



Shark Meat

By Will F. Jenkins

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM MEADE PRINCE

You might not think it, but there are times when a hungry shark comes in handy

THERE was sea, and there was sky, and there were waves, and all were pitiless. But the men in the boat found hatred only for a shark. Perhaps because the others were impersonal in their lack of mercy, while the shark grew insolent. Today he had circled the small boat deliberately, almost nudging it as he went across its bows. He was growing weary of waiting and he was sardonically aware of the men's helplessness. Also, it takes much food to keep eighteen feet of sleek deadliness in good humor. The shark was growing peevish—and he was bigger than the boat.

The boat was possibly fourteen feet long, salt-streaked and already having an appearance of the antique. The sail was shabby and glittering with salt crystals. The fraying, improvised stays had a white incrustation. The tattered garments of the men were stiffened and abrasive. Their skin, exposed to the sun, was reddened and blistered. Beneath their rags, it was scratched and irritated. Wherever their movements did not rub it off, the wood of the boat had a whitish, moldy-seeming bloom of dried sea water. More sea water sloshed erratically among the bottom boards, and waves licked at the lower edge of the boomed-out sail. Yet other waves stretched out in a heaving confusion to the horizon the men occasionally saw.

MOSTLY, though, they watched for the shark. They had no hope of sighting any ship, and therefore did not need to watch the distant waters. The wind was dead astern, so they did not need to row. The shark was their present danger. If they could live longer than it was possible to live, and if the boat sailed faster than it was possible to sail, and if their navigation was more accurate than a small boat makes possible—why, they had a chance. They might reach a small island marked "Position Doubtful" on the charts, and on that island they could probably starve more comfortably than in the boat. There would be no other advantage. But the men hated the shark because he threatened that small triumph.

His fin split the water, only yards from the boat he dwarfed. The man at the steering oar said:

"There's Oscar."

They had given him a name at the beginning, when they were still capable of jest. The man who had seemed to drowse now cursed the shark in a hoarse, croaking voice. The third man said nothing.



He regarded the shark with abstracted eyes, chewing and sucking automatically upon something in his mouth. It was a nail, and once upon a time he had believed that it eased his thirst. All three of the men were scarecrows. The sun had scorched them, drawing the moisture remorselessly from their bodies. The fat was gone from beneath their skins, so that stringy muscles showed with a stark clarity in their infrequent movements. Their eyes were sunk in their heads. Their lips were cracked and bluish.

"He'd ought to get discouraged any time now," said the man at the steering oar, unconvincingly. "We musta made a lotta distance since yesterday. He'll get tired, maybe."

There was no answer. The drowsy man ceased his profane croaking and watched the shark with hate-filled eyes. The third man chewed and sucked monotonously upon the nail.

"We made a hell of a lotta distance," repeated the man at the steering oar. "We been goin' full speed all the time."

The drowsy man croaked:

"Yeah? What good does that do?"

"Oscar'll get tired, maybe," said the man at the steering oar, without conviction.

tion. "Anyhow, we're still goin' places." "What places?"

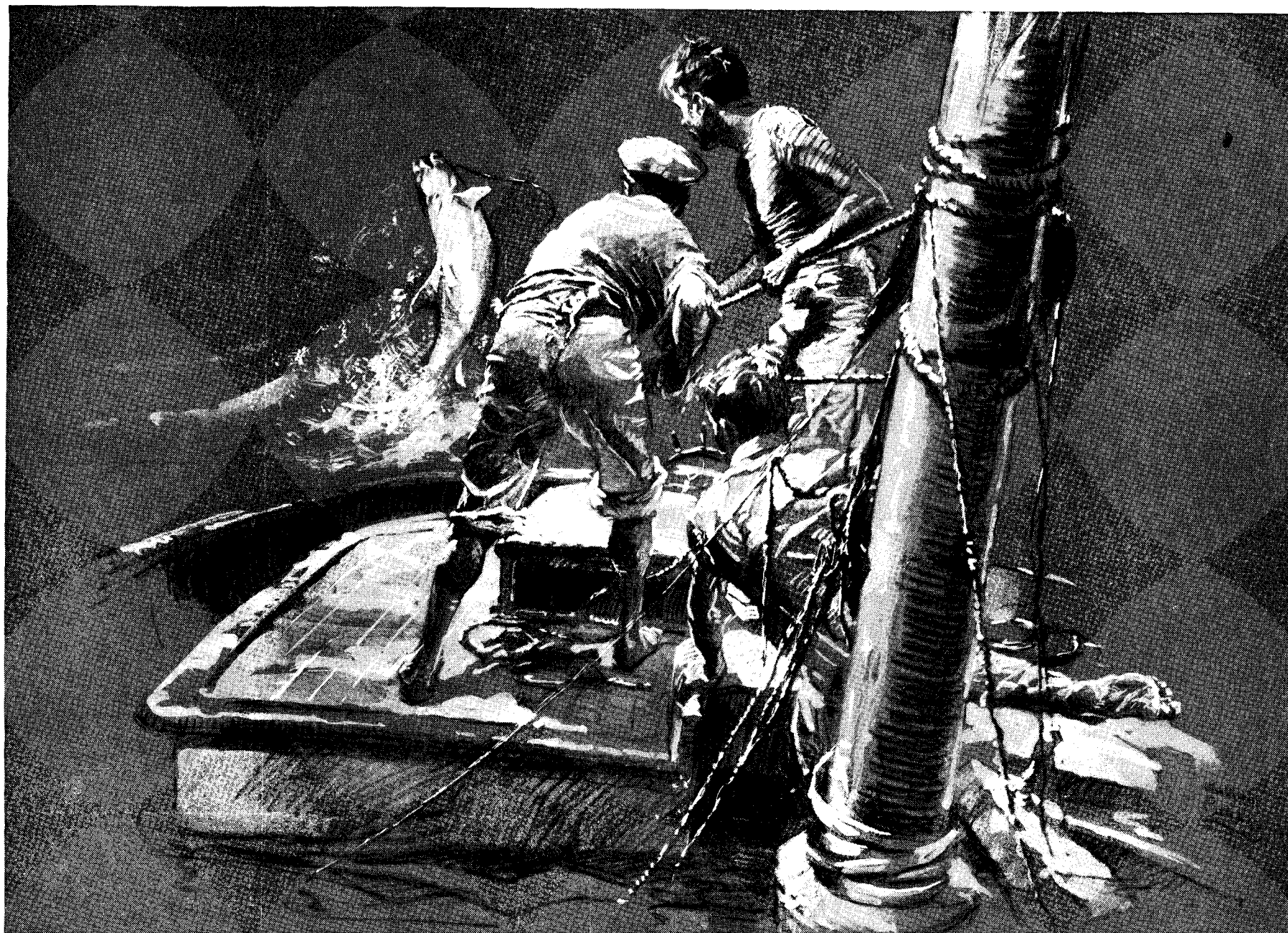
The man at the steering oar did not answer. Oscar went on ahead. They saw his dorsal fin vanish beyond wave crests. A wave, surging from behind the boat, lifted up the stern and heaved it roughly onward. The boat swept forward. Another wave came from astern and heaved the boat up and forward. And another. And another. The men did not notice. Exactly the same process had been taking place, day in and day out, for so long a time that they had lost count of it.

OSCAR returned, swimming fast. He came so close that through the shimmering, utterly clear green water they could see every detail of his sleek length. Tiny ripples made his image waver irregularly, but they saw his piglike eyes. He slowed alongside the boat.

The man with hate-filled eyes—he had been dozing—cursed him again in a croaking voice. The man who chewed and sucked the nail leaned forward deliberately. He put his hand over the side. He splashed water at the shark. Oscar moved away.

"You hadn't ought to do that," said the man at the steering oar. "He's gettin' plenty nervy. I've seen sharks snap





They squealed hoarsely in malevolent delight. They watched square rods of surface torn to foam

at oars in the water. So've you. He knows we can't do nothin'. Suppose he took a notion to snap at y' hand when y' splashed at him?"

There was no need to answer. The boat was a small one. It had been a captain's dinghy, designed for service in smooth harbor waters. It had no business out here in the open South Pacific anyhow. Its freeboard was low. If the shark snapped at a man's hand over its gunwale, he would swamp it.

Something came fluttering over the waves. A sea gull. It careened sharply and shot upward on arching wings, squawking its astonishment at sight of the men. It wheeled and flapped away.

"Now, that's encouragin'," said the man at the steering oar. "That was a gull."

Neither of the others stirred. One chewed and sucked automatically upon the nail, his eyes fixed upon nothing whatever. The other drooped in his seat, seeming to try to drowse as if sleep could be used as anesthesia against hunger and thirst and hatred of the shark.

"Where there's a sea gull," said the man at the stern, "there's bound to be fish. For him to eat. An' if there's fish for him to eat, there's bigger ones to eat them too, an' bigger ones to eat them, an' Oscar'll be huntin' himself somethin' else besides us for his dinner before long."

Again there was no answer. The man at the steering oar was trying to convince himself, and the others knew it. The boat sailed on. There were moments when from it there could be seen noth-

ing but moving green walls of water. But the thoughts of all the men remained fixed upon the shark.

He came upward from blue depths. Lazily. Insolently. His nose, when his fin broke water, was a bare yard behind the counter. He kept effortless pace with the boat. Presently he moved. The boat shuddered suddenly. He had scraped its bottom. Deliberately. The sensation was horrible. For many days—it seemed for centuries—the boat had floated as an unstable atom upon a liquid universe. The blow of the shark's body, the impact of an outside solidness, was paralyzing.

NONE of the three men spoke. The man at the steering oar gripped it hard. The drowsy man held fast to his seat, his face contorted with a despairing hatred. The third man ceased, for a moment, to chew and suck upon the nail.

But nothing happened. Perhaps a bucketful of water came in over the gunwale as a result of the bump. It may be that the actual contact with a man-made object was as startling and in part as disconcerting to the shark as to the men. He sank. Presently the third man bent over and painfully bailed out the boat.

The drowsy man cursed horribly. His hands shook with his hatred. His whole body quivered. Because if they could live longer than was possible, and if the boat sailed faster than it could, and if their navigation was accurate—which it was not—and if an island marked "Position Doubtful" was where the charts showed it—why, they had a chance to

reach land and starve on shore instead of in the water. And the shark threatened this high privilege.

"We—uh—we got to do somethin'," said the man at the steering oar anxiously. "We got to put a scare in him somehow."

The drowsy man said bitterly: "Le's all make faces at him nex' time we see him!"

The third man continued to chew and suck at the dry nail in his mouth. He seemed absorbed in thought. He had seated himself upon the floor boards so that his back was braced by the side of the boat. He yielded completely to the motions of the waves. Sometimes his abstracted eyes gazed deeply into welling walls of greenish water. Sometimes they gazed unseeingly up into limitless sky. Sometimes they ranged across an illimitable space of tumbling, heaving water.

"I—I guess," said the man at the steering oar, "we got to splash at him. But—uh—le's throw water with the bail. He can snap at that an' no harm done."

The drowsy man—no longer drowsy—folded his arms. The third man chewed and sucked automatically. His eyes, though, ceased gradually to be abstracted. He moved his head. He looked, and waited until the movement of the boat permitted him to see again in the same direction. He stared again, and again. Then he extended a skinny arm, on which stringy muscles stood out in horrible relief.

"Gulls," he said in a husky voice. "Look!"

The others stared in their turn. There was a little congregation of gulls, distant a mile or more. They hovered above some unseen thing in the water.

A WAVE came from astern and shoved the boat roughly. It passed on, forward, and for a space the boat lay in the trough. Then another wave came. It was no less rough in its handling of the boat. The men did not notice. . . . Presently they saw the gulls a second time. There were not many of them. No more than a dozen or so. And it was unquestionable that their flight had no look of eagerness. They were too widely scattered to indicate foodstuff afloat upon the sea.

"There's somethin' there," said the man at the steering oar anxiously. "I wisht I knew what it was."

A huge, triangular dorsal fin broke water a dozen yards away. The drowsy man, hate-filled, tried to spit toward it. He failed.

"What's th' difference?" he demanded bitterly.

"It might mean a lotta difference," said the man at the steering oar hopefully. "A lotta difference. If it was somethin' for Oscar to eat, now, he might stick around eatin' it an' leave us be."

"He'd ha' smelled it by now," said the drowsy man bitterly, "an' if it was somethin' to eat I'd fight 'im for it, anyways."

The man at the steering oar was painfully anxious to hope.

"Maybe it's somethin' that ain't dead

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Hope Chest

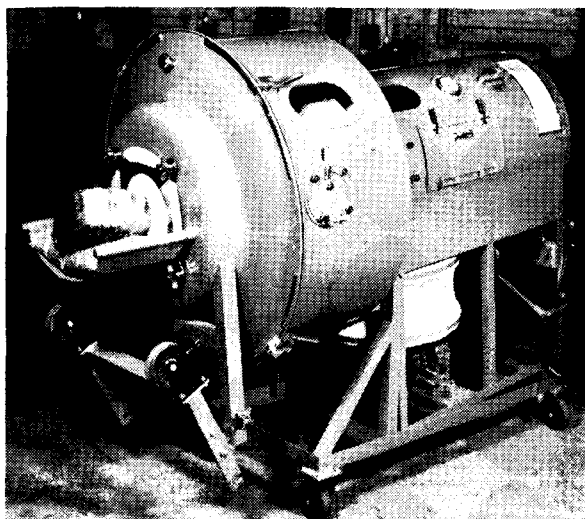
By J. D. Ratcliff

AN IRON lung looks like a cylindrical metal casket with a lot of plumbing on it. When operating, it makes a noise like the ventilating fan in a restaurant window. It's an interesting piece of machinery for one lone reason: it saves the lives of people who would *have* to die if there were no iron lung available. Get that straight—not people who might die, but people who would *have* to die.

Anything that will knock your breathing apparatus out of kilter—and there are a dozen things that will—can make you a prospective tenant of one of these respirators. Suppose, for example, that you have sucked into your nose a few of the submicroscopic organisms that cause infantile paralysis.

The virus works its way through the olfactory nerve—the nerve of smell—around the brain, and into the spinal column. In the spine the microbes begin to eat at the little “horn” cells on the backbone—the little nubs where nerves feed into the main line of the body's telegraph system.

If the germs do their work sufficiently well, they



destroy the nerve links. A doctor can detect this easily. He simply pinches a patient's thigh, arm, or toe. “Feel that?” he'll ask. Maybe the patient will wearily mumble: “Feel what?” The doctor will try to pass off his own question as a bit of medical foolishness. But to him the patient's answer tells a bitter story: paralysis is on the march.

If the march progresses toward the chest, there is every likelihood that the muscles that make the chest rhythmically rise and fall, the muscles that enable living creatures to breathe, will be affected. And, when they cease to get the messages that keep this miraculous process going day and night, they simply stop working. Then, within a few minutes, the patient dies. He did, that is, until the iron lung came along.

Today the story doesn't necessarily have a tragic ending. For, if the stricken person happens to be in a big hospital that has one of these bulky respirators tucked away in a storeroom, the doctor will order it out as soon as he detects any sign of chest-muscle paralysis. Nurses will slide the patient into the chamber, pull his head through a rubber collar at one end, and start the motor going. A miraculously simple miracle begins working.

Understand the construction of the human chest and lungs and you'll understand the operation of the mechanical breather. The lungs hang in a cavity in which there is a partial vacuum. When a message slithers along a certain set of nerve fibers ordering muscles to expand the chest, the cavity in which the lungs hang is enlarged. To fill this extra space the lungs themselves have to inflate. And as they do, they suck air in through nose or mouth. That's all there is to breathing.

When this mechanism goes on the blink and the muscles don't do their work any more, the iron lung gets its chance. Hospital attendants must work rapidly and efficiently. If they can't get air into the sick person's lungs within six minutes of his last breath, it might be better for them not to get it there at all. For, after those six minutes, oxygen-starved brain cells begin to break down and the patient—if he is revived—will probably spend (*Continued on page 47*)



Above is the room-size respirator in Boston's Children's Hospital, here literally supplying the breath of life to these cheerful child patients, who must live in it until paralyzed muscles can be made to resume the job of breathing. At the left is one of the latest types of “iron lung,” one of the several hundred that are in daily use in America

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